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SUBJECT: BURMA: STAFFDEL GROVE ON STATE/AID PROPOSALS

REF: RANGOON 888

Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

- ¶1. (C) Embassy discussed the State/AID proposals for additional assistance for cyclone-recovery activities ("Element 2") and a new mechanism for civil society support ("Element 1") with Senate Appropriations Committee Minority Clerk Paul Grove during his November 8-10 visit to Burma.
- ¶2. (C) Grove said he sees merit in the continuation of humanitarian assistance for cyclone recovery at a significant level and would undertake discussions in Washington about potential funding sources. During Grove's visit (Reftel), interlocutors, including diplomats, NGOs and UN representatives, agreed that the regime has allowed unusual space for humanitarian assistance efforts in the Delta. That has not translated into increased space elsewhere in Burma, at least not yet. However, Grove observed that the humanitarian need is pervasive in the delta; and recipients clearly see that donors, not the regime, are the saviors.
- ¶3. (C) Regarding Element 1, Embassy Rangoon staff described to Grove the usefulness of a fast and flexible mechanism to support civil society/democracy initiatives as conditions warrant. Grove had reservations. He noted competing priorities and budget constraints, particularly given the fiscal environment. He queried funding a new program generated just before a transition to a new presidential administration. He expressed reservations about employing a contractor, which might have little experience in Burma's unique operational environment, to do such work. He suggested that, while the current embassy team has good judgment, a future team might not. He suggested that the National Endowment for Democracy, designed for sustainability and tasked with political-oriented assistance, might be the appropriate tool. Grove said he would make no judgment about the current Congressional hold on Element 1 until he returns to D.C. and engages in further discussion there.
- ¶4. (C) Embassy officers discussed the current small grants and PD programming with Grove and gave him a tour of the American Center. He praised such efforts, noting they build local capacity and help show the flag.
- ¶5. (SBU) Mr. Grove cleared this message.
VAJDA